

# MAN, ALIVE!

*Fall 1998 (Volume XI Number 3)*

*Man, Alive!* is a journal of men sharing from the heart  
the joys and problems of being male.

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## Submission Deadlines

THE FIFTH DAY OF

November '98 (Winter '98-'99)

February '99 (Spring '99)

## Submission Formats

Paper and fax are okay, but please send submissions as a *text* file on a floppy disk or as an e-mail attachment if you can, to save us having to type your words into the computer. We'll be happy to help you do this. Please try to keep submissions below 1500 words.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions. No fees are paid and no submissions are returned. Copyright of all published material reverts to the author on publication.

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## From the Editor

The summer gathering was very much a success, thanks to everyone and especially the planning committee. I asked those present to each write a few hundred words about it for this issue; the only submission was from Stephen Miller, and it appears in this issue with my gratitude! I personally have not written about the event because I don't want to break the spell any more than returning from the woods already has. If you attended, your memories of it are probably as intense as mine. If you were not, well--it's one of those things where "you had to be there." I'll be at the Fall Conference, and recommend it highly to all concerned. There's nothing like being with a bunch of guys you can relate to!

A reprint from former editor Chuck Cocklereas appears in this issue. There's a wealth of good stuff in past issues, and I'd like to ask all the other former editors of *Man, Alive!* to send a piece from their tenure to reprint. I'll even volunteer to type it from your photocopy.

As usual, *Man, Alive!* needs your submissions to continue.

"You must do it yourself, but you don't have to do it alone"

## 1998 Fall Conference

"Healing the Healer Within"

Thursday, October 8, 7 p.m. to Sunday, October 11, 12 noon

Healing comes in all shapes and sizes. Join the diversity of men as we celebrate the healer within each of us. Activities include large and small group discussion, workshops and breakout groups.

Dancing \* Drumming \* Yoga \* Massage \* Sweatlodge

Talking Stick \* Healing Circles \* Ceremonies

Free-time activities include: hiking, frisbee, touch football and more.

Attendance at the fall conference typically ranges from 85 to 100 men between the ages of 16 and 80. There are no "paid presenters," and all participants are strongly encouraged to attend the entire four days.

For the third year in a row New Mexico Men's Wellness has received a New Mexico state grant to fund scholarships for young men of low income to attend, and you are also encouraged to make a monetary contribution to the scholarship fund. To receive a partial scholarship, send a written request plus a check for \$125.

Tuition of \$225 includes room and board, t-shirt and a year's subscription to *Man, Alive!* There will be a \$95 refund for cancellations before October 1. After that there will be no refund.

Make check payable to New Mexico Men's Wellness, and send it to P.O. Box 23346, Santa Fe, NM 87502. *Please specify t-shirt size: S / M / L / XL / XXL and your age at time of the conference.*

Questions about the conference? Want to volunteer to help? Call Michael Hopp (505) 820-9363 or Jerry Richardson (505) 988-5459.

New Mexico Men's Wellness is open to all men regardless of creed, color, sexual orientation or beliefs.

Please bring two things with you to the fall conference: something which represents healing to you (such as a book, a picture, a medical instrument); and, to decorate the pavilion, something which you have made at past conferences (such as a staff or mask).

## The Fence

by Grey Chisholm

Some things follow us through life. They show up again and again in slightly different forms. One of the things which has carried through in my life is setting fence.

When one is eighteen one is immortal. It was the summer of '73. I had fixed up an old 1960 Ford Comet and left home in Colorado to make my fortune in the world. On the way I stopped to visit with my grandparents in Louisiana.

My grandfather owned 125 acres of prime pine woods in the toe of Louisiana. He had about half of it cleared for pasture and the rest in pine and oak, turkey and deer. On the pasturage he raised breeder beef with just enough acreage in alfalfa, clover, and corn for his own cattle. About a half-acre near the house was set aside as a truck garden, and he ran a dozen or so bee hives.

I'd meant to stay a week or so, then get back on track working on that fortune. Somehow I ended up staying the rest of the summer and fall, learning welding at the local Vo-Tech. That I was to carry my weight was assumed by both my grandfather and myself. So I was up at "can't see" to start on chores before breakfast, then off to school. After school I had to get home to do more chores until "can't see" again, before I could cut out with my friends to drive around the parish and get into trouble. Of course weekends were full of all-day chores.

Gramps never kept me from riding around with my friends, he just expected the chores to get done. If I did not do them, he would do them. He never scolded me, but his 'look' that I'd let him down kept the chores pretty much up to the mark and the riding around within manageable levels.

Along the way I started to learn from Gramps. I learned about bees, chickens, and cattle. I learned that the cool of the night was the best time to move a hive. I learned that chickens were plain dumb. I learned not to let a bull hook a steel gate with his horns (that gate is still not quite right). And I learned how to stretch fence.

Fence was about the biggest job on the farm. It seemed like it was always needing patched and fixed. Gramps and I started out by cutting our own posts. First light would find us out in his woods. He'd select young trees 4 to 6 inches across. We'd cut them down, trim them, stack them on a trailer, then haul them out of the woods with his old '30 John Deere. We'd haul them to a creosote plant to have them treated, pick up the last load we'd dropped off, then head back home. Then as they were needed we'd haul them back out to the fence line, sink them into the ground, and stretch wire. Of course all that was along with feeding the chickens, robbing the bee hives, and de-horning or branding the yearling cattle.

Let me tell that story again. First light would find us out in his woods. Being eighteen, I was cock of the walk. I'd be cutting trees and throwing them around like nothing. I could out-work just about any man, especially a 72-year old man! I could horse the chain saw around, drag the trimmed limbs into a pile, and do anything else with ease. By lunch, the day was beginning to catch up. I'd used the best of my energy but could still hold my own. But by evening, I was dragging. It was easier to lift a post onto a stack rather than throw it. In fact it was easier yet to wait a moment, maybe the post would lift itself. And of course, right next to me was Gramps. He was moving at exactly the same pace at

which he'd started. It was all I could do to just stay up with him, let alone match his work. Maybe I wasn't immortal after all.

No matter how tired I got, we kept working. By the end of summer we had replaced one whole fence line and rejuvenated the rest. During the fall we would find ourselves out there, repairing places where hurricane winds had blown a tree across the fence. Also, by the end of that summer and fall I'd learned a few things. Not only could I stretch fence, maybe I could pace myself too.

Strange things happen in this world. Growing up we moved from state to state. Then as adults, my siblings and I moved from state to state. Somehow my parents and I ended up living in New Mexico only about an hour apart.

A few years ago, I heard that my father, Hap, was re-setting the gate up at his place outside of Tijeras. My wife, Michele, and I drove up there to lend a hand. Dad and I moved the gate to the side of the road. We drove two posts per side to set it up for a sliding gate on rollers. Then we drove additional posts connecting the existing fence to the new gate posts. Finally, we stretched fence, tying the whole thing together.

As I stood there, taking a breather, I had a thought: we worked well together! We seemed to know what the other was going to do: a tool handed without asking, a little more pressure on a wire stretcher when needed. I felt really good. Then it hit me: we'd been taught by the same man! With his son, my father, I was now using the knowledge which Gramps had shared with me. We continued working and completed the job. The gate is still standing and working today.

Just last weekend I tackled the front gate at my own place. One of the posts had rotted out and needed replacing. I was up and out on the fence line at first light. I had originally set the gate post in concrete so had to dig a very large hole. The hole got bigger and bigger, exposing the concrete until I could finally get a chain around it. With truck and come-along, I finally lifted the old concrete out. I hauled a railroad tie from the back up to the front then placed it in the hole. With a level and an old halyard from a sailboat owned fifteen years ago, I lashed the post in place vertical and just the right distance from its mate on the other side. The hole was so big digging out the old post, it took four bags of concrete to anchor the post. I put the dirt on top and tamped it down good and firm. I set an angled post to support against the pull of the fence and anchored it in too. By the time I quit, in the early afternoon, I was not even tired. I had worked steadily; I had paced myself.

The next afternoon I finished the job. I stretched the fence and hung the gate. It was a perfect fit. As I swung the gate back and forth with just a push of the hand, I felt good. Once again I had used the knowledge Gramps had shared with me to do a job and do it well. Not only the knowledge of setting fence, but also of how to work.

Thank you Gramps!

# Diversity

by Greg Bunker

*See me, the person, the individual.  
My culture is my family, my family's history, my friends.  
My culture is a coat I wear that surrounds my house and my family.  
Let me respect you, the person, the individual  
Who wears a coat of culture that is unique and full of color.  
Let us honor each other's traditions,  
And let us celebrate together our births  
And mourn together our deaths.*

# My Own Eyes Now

by Eaglecrow

*I saw you through another's eyes, Father,  
Eyes not yet my own.  
And I saw the shadow only, Father,  
A crooked half-way view.*

*You, the never-enough half-man,  
Who let your family down  
Who let your wife down  
Who let your son down.  
I thought this was you  
And I believed it to be true.  
But these were eyes borrowed  
From one you could never please,  
The longsuffering woman mother  
Who raised the boy that I was.*

*The impossible task fell to you.  
For I needed mentors and I needed teachers  
I needed uncles and grandfathers  
And was given a man instead.  
I got Superman and Walt Disney  
And I got Davy Crockett, king of the wild frontier  
For Christ's sake.*

*I needed a King*

*And was given a man instead.  
I needed a wise mentor  
And was given a man instead.  
I needed perfect nurture  
And was given a man instead.  
I needed a godlike warrior chief  
And was given a man instead.  
I needed God  
And was given a man instead.*

*Seeing now through eyes fully mine,  
I know the gifts you gave.  
Courage, humor, spirit and joy  
Dance all over you, Father;  
Honesty, nurture, and fierceness, too.  
A truer man is hard to find.*

*Thank you for these gifts.  
For now I see  
With eyes now fully mine  
That you were always enough  
And that being a man is always enough.*

Editor's note: Eaglecrow is Larry Walker, who lives in Friendswood, Texas.

## Washing Away the Violence

by Chuck Cockelreas

Editor's note: I asked Chuck to select an article to reprint from his tenure as first editor of *Man, Alive!* From his home in Salem, Oregon, he sent me this piece, which is from the first issue (March, 1998), and he mentioned in his accompanying letter, "I don't know how many of the men who now participate in the annual conferences have war or military experience, but much of what I talked about in this piece also applies to the working of bureaucracies. In a certain sense, such work inevitably leaves us with dirty hands." Chuck turns 70 this month, and he and his wife, Lynn, "have just accepted an invitation to help form a spiritually based co-op senior living center in Petaluma, California."

Two years ago, in the Fall of 1986, we had among us at Ghost Ranch, half a dozen Vietnam combat veterans. We were all drawn into a moment of powerful catharsis when one of them stood up and said, "Those of us who fought in Vietnam, who thought we were serving our country, came home to public anger and rejection. We have never yet been welcomed home."

In the totally spontaneous ceremony that followed, we not only welcomed our veterans home that morning, we also welcomed ourselves back into the human race. How? By giving ourselves permission to deeply feel the anguish, the pain, the isolation of other men who had faced what our government had labeled "the enemy," and then come home to find themselves at best ignored, at worst reviled, by their own people.

The rest of us, who had been in other wars or who had lived through other wars at home, discovered we, too, had great unhealed wounds, great areas of tender scar tissue—all of which centered on war, on killing, on the expediency of solving political problems by inflicting death and misery on other human beings.

### **Why Are We There?**

Vietnam, and Korea (and now the Middle East and Central America), all beg the question why. Why were we there? Why *are* we there? Those questions troubled us at the Men's Wellness Conference, and they trouble us now. American males, without adequate explanation, continue to be asked to put their lives on the line—often in countries they have barely heard of before they are assigned there, rifle in hand, with orders to kill if necessary.

We had only one Vietnam combat veteran with us at this year's conference. Not surprisingly, he's still trying to recover from the effects of Vietnam. The official explanation of why he had been in Vietnam (and the one he was told to give to the combat riflemen assigned to him) was that Americans were at risk in the jungles and rice paddies of Southeast Asia to help the Vietnamese achieve democracy—and in the process, to protect the United States (and the rest of the world) against the growing power and influence of Communism. The facts, of course, did not bear that out. Vietnam is still divided, (as is Korea) and our Vietnam vets came home to crashing indifference, anger, and rejection.

### **A Ceremony to Cleanse**

Two years ago, the welcoming home ceremony had given us great comfort. This year, we felt the need for another kind of ceremony, one based on Arthur Egendorf's book, *Healing From the War*. Egendorf, a psychologist and Vietnam veteran, outlines in this book a process by which we can heal our warrior spirit and then use that spirit, that strength, that energy, "to negotiate, for ourselves and our work, a truly lasting peace."

The last morning of the conference, we had a cleansing and healing ceremony. Some men at the conference missed it. Some of you weren't there. Here are my memories of the ceremony, plus some impressions and thoughts:

—It snowed Saturday night, a long, slow snow with flakes the size of silver dollars. When we awakened, the world was as pure as we hoped we might be after we washed away the anger we did not understand, the anguish of knowing we carry always within us a virus, a propensity for gratuitous violence.

—The objects used in the ceremony were simple and pure: a white porcelain pitcher filled with warm water; a white porcelain wash basin to catch the water; a white towel.

—We stood in a circle, facing in. Three men, each a veteran, moved around the circle. In his turn, each man held his hands over the porcelain bowl. Water was poured, the hands moved over and under each other in a scrubbing motion, then were held out to be dried. Through it all, very softly, we sang the words from an old gospel song, "I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield, down by the riverside."

—Men cried over memories long repressed—memories of punishment for refusing to fight (though not to serve); memories of wars fought without rational explanation of worthwhile results; memories of friends, comrades, strangers who were dead, maimed, their mental and physical lives changed forever by physical and psychic wounds.

—Beyond the tears was a profound sense of relief, of release. Symbolically, in what had begun as a simple cleansing ceremony, we had actually washed our hands of war. We had laid down our swords and shields. Together, in the words of the hymn, we had agreed we would "study war no more." At least, not the kind of war that involves death.

\* \* \*

We were not then, nor are we now, turning our backs on the problems the world has been trying to solve through physical violence. It's simply that, in Egendorf's terms, we managed to heal our own warrior spirit. We knew then, we know now, that the war is not over. The decisive battles, the meaningful battles, are all still ahead.

What we learned in those quiet moments, softly singing the words of an old song, is that those decisive battles will be fought, must be fought, not with swords and rifles, not with bombs and bullets and napalm, but with imagination, consideration, empathy, creativity—with all the strengths of the human spirit.

## Personal notes on the Summer Gathering, 1998

by Stephen Miller

I feel lucky to be a part of this gathering. I'm spending the better part of 40 hours in a beautiful setting in the Jemez Mountains. Being from Oregon, I don't get the same kind of beauty and "feeling" New Mexico offers. Oregon has its own beauty, and it's definitely different. But here, the smell of the air is sweet with the pine needles. The sounds in the air are of windblown pines, laughing men, and the sound of a volleyball hitting open palms.

My work around "You-niqueness" is centered around me being more satisfied with myself, and indulging in less self-doubt. That indulgence is costing me satisfaction in my marriage. It's easy for me to not be responsible around household projects if I get defensive every time a comment is made about how I should have done something differently. "Why should I do this? I know she'll want it to be different." She gets upset and feels she's doing everything. I get defensive. Dissatisfaction. The cycle perpetuates itself.

I've got an opportunity this weekend to look within my life, to step outside the day to day "stuff," and look objectively at my circumstances and reconnect with my "You-niqueness," with spirit.

With me are other men, all on their own journey. They are supporting me in my journey, as I am supporting them. Sharing ourselves in this open, safe space gives us insight into our own history.

Yes, I feel lucky to be a part of this gathering! I am grateful to everyone who helped organize this weekend. And I am grateful to "all my relations" for walking the path they have to get me here.

## I Speak My Truth

by Elliot Madriss

*I speak my truth  
Though the skies may be stormy.  
I speak my truth  
Though no one may hear.  
I speak my truth  
Though the darkness surrounds me.  
I speak my truth  
And I release my fear.  
I speak my truth  
And the angels they hold me.  
I speak my truth  
And I'm strong once again.  
I speak my truth  
And then I'm so free.  
I speak my truth  
And the bondage will end.  
I speak my truth  
For the truth must be known.  
I speak my truth  
And the heavens will sing.*

*I speak my truth  
And I'm never alone.  
I speak my truth  
And it's hope that I bring.*

Editor's note: Elliot sang this song with his own guitar accompaniment in the circle of men at the Summer Gathering.

## Excerpt from Rites of Passage

by Robert Francis Johnson

*A man's heart is his womb.  
My father, my son, my brother  
to be a man  
means  
feeling pain as well as joy.  
Pain is our friend  
Pain can make us wise, aware,  
alive!  
Joy is the best gift we can give  
ourselves and those we love.  
Brothers are here  
to heal and share  
the pain.  
Only men (with the blessing of spirit)  
can heal another man's pain.  
As men we can give birth to beauty;  
healing this wounded land.  
As a rainbow of men  
we can join hands  
and hearts  
for there is always  
room in the circle of men  
to share love and respect,  
to appreciate our sameness  
and our differences.  
Being a man  
means being the  
best  
you can be,  
and allowing,  
insisting,  
that your spirit*

*stands proudly,  
nobly,  
fully erect  
within your body.  
My father, my son,  
my brother  
welcome home.*

Editor's note: This poem was written in honor of the rites of passage ceremony at the Tulalip reservation north of Seattle, Washington, in August 1995.

## THE ISSUE OF DIVERSITY

by David Robertson

I've been thinking about the issue of diversity for some time now, particularly with respect to Men's Wellness. I notice that most of the men in Men's Wellness are white, liberal, educated, middle class. We don't have many men of color. We don't have many, if any, poor or uneducated men. How about some conservative working class people to balance out the liberal professionals? How about some nuclear energy proponents to balance out the environmentalists? How about some men who don't usually agree with our point of view?

*I think that the term "men's wellness" may be a misnomer.*

*We may be open to all men, but we don't seem to represent all men.*

Clearly diversity goes well beyond the racial/ethnic continuum. In fact, that may be among the least challenging type of diversity for some of us. Consider economic or educational level, political affiliation or values. For how many of us is there prejudice in these areas, more so than in the racial/ethnic? Where is our level of discomfort greatest?

With what difference would we have the most difficulty accepting another, and loving and respecting that person as another human being who is different from us? The answers for each of us might be surprising.

A number of years ago, I heard of a program that got nuclear proponents and environmentalists together. They just went off in pairs and had lunch. I don't know the outcomes, but I suspect each got to see each other as a thinking feeling human being and not just an ogre from the other side. They got to see each others' similarities, as well as each others' differences.

Biological diversity supports the health of the planet. Diversity among people, in which differences are respected and even encouraged, likely also supports the health of the planet. I hope that Men's Wellness can be an active part of that. I suggest that diversity be the theme for the 1999 summer gathering; I will propose that to the committee.

Editor's note: David Robertson has volunteered to lead the planning committee for the 1999 summer gathering. He can be reached at 242-5865 in Albuquerque, or by e-mail: [robertson\\_d@apsicc.aps.edu](mailto:robertson_d@apsicc.aps.edu).

## Piercing the Darkness by John M. Petric

*A man lights a candle  
To chase the dark.  
He zealously guards the precious flame  
Created from a spark.  
For well he knows  
That if he tends it carefully,  
Its light will someday reach  
The darkest corner of the universe.  
A man writes a poem  
For much the same reason.*

## The Sacrifice by John M. Petric

*I held you in my arms,  
Me boy—o,  
Cradled you unto my breast  
And knew that I loved no one in the world  
Enough to send you off  
To die for them.  
And then I remembered that  
The Father of all men  
Loved me enough  
To send His only son  
To die for me.*

## Little Men by John M. Petric

*This world is filled with  
little men.  
I will not be one.  
I make no excuses.  
What I am, I am.  
The good and bad,*

*Perfidious and honorable,  
All are part of me.  
I like the man I am.  
I refuse to whine and grovel,  
Crying out, "It's not my fault—I did not choose my world!"  
Whoever did?  
We play the hand we're dealt,  
And playing boldly sometimes takes the day.  
I like playing knuckle-down  
With life and death,  
Shooting for all the marbles,  
Playing for keeps  
Until I lose.  
We cannot win this game, I fear—it's rigged.  
But I will have the satisfaction, anyway,  
Of knowing that  
I spent my days and nights  
Playing with the big boys.*

## SONORA BAY, 1998

by Jake Tausch

Along the shore pure white sand is caressed and rocked by gentle blue waves. Early evening stars glimmer in the darkening sky, bright points of energy somehow part of but indifferent to the beauty surrounding me. The full moon is rising over the desert mountains across the bay. Moonlight creates a sparkling road across the water that looks so real I want to run out on it, kneel down, and scoop up a handful of glittery moon energy ... take it home with me. Magic quickens with the gathering night and all things are possible ... here ... now. Anyway, I imagine my world will be so from this night on.

The first time I was here you couldn't come, so I stored this place in my soul, took it home and shared it with you. Now you've left and I was almost afraid to come back ... afraid of the memories and lost dreams this powerful place might bring back. Somehow everything is OK ... nature soothes me and there are no ghosts walking by my side. I enjoy the beauty with no restraint. The magic is for me.